

Preventing suicides goal of new Monroe County coalition

Coalition brings local groups together to provide education, support

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Matt Oliver

In the spring of 2007, [Isaiah Diener Stroup](#) — a Bloomington High School North graduate, 21st Century Scholar and sophomore at Purdue University — hanged himself, presumably due to severe depression.

In the fall of 2007, [Ben Schwartzman](#) — a 19-year-old struggling with bipolar disorder — hanged himself in the basement of his parents' home. His father, Bloomington resident Ed Schwartzman, feels his son's pot smoking and antidepressant medications — plus the way his brain was hard-wired — sent him down a chasm of despair from which he could not escape.

In July of this year, 18-year-old [Nick Arvin](#) ended his life with a self-inflicted gunshot from a 9 mm handgun, after a police chase that began in Bloomington ended in an Owen County hay field.

Unfortunately, these types of tragedies are not rare. More than 31,000 Americans die by suicide each year, making it the eighth-leading cause of death in the U.S., and the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds.

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Matt Oliver, Centerstone's regional director of clinical services, said a 2009 survey found that Hoosier youth are more prone to consider, plan and commit suicide than national averages.

The study showed that 17.2 percent of Hoosier high schoolers (compared to the national average of 13.8 percent) have seriously considered suicide, 13.5 percent of Indiana high schoolers (compared to the national average of 10.9 percent) have made a plan to commit suicide, and 9.3 of the state's high schoolers (compared to the national average of 6.3 percent) have attempted suicide.

Oliver said it's for the purpose of preventing such instances that a new Monroe County Suicide Prevention Coalition has been formed.

Officially a subcommittee of the Monroe County Chapter of Mental Health of America, the 13-member coalition is made up of representatives from such organizations as Centerstone, city of Bloomington, Mental Health of America, Bloomington Hospital, Meadows Hospital and the Monroe County YMCA.

“The goal is to help collaboratively prevent suicide in Monroe County by mobilizing local resources, collaborating with the Indiana Suicide Prevention Coalition, and providing a clearinghouse of information and resources to the community,” said Oliver, the coalition’s facilitator. “By having all the providers and stakeholders together at the table, we can avoid duplication of effort and coordinate community initiatives designed to prevent suicide.”

Oliver said the coalition hopes to offer information and training to local school teachers, students and community groups — helping them to recognize possible suicide warning signs and directing them to places that can provide suicide prevention assistance and support.

“If we can help teens recognize signs of suicide in their friends, they can bring it to the attention of adults,” said Jane McLeod, a professor of sociology at Indiana University and a member of the suicide prevention coalition.

Oliver said the coalition also hopes to provide speakers for community groups about suicide awareness and prevention. McLeod said the group might offer programs to jail inmates, or coordinate targeted responses to high-profile suicides in the community with public discussions and guest columns in the newspaper.

Out of the Darkness walk

The second annual Out of the Darkness Community Walk will take place Oct. 10 at the Indiana University football stadium.

Organized by the Indiana chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the walk is designed to raise funds for and awareness about suicide, and to support those who have lost friends or family members to suicide.

See www.outofthedarkness.org for more on the walk.

Suicide facts

There is a suicide every 16 minutes in the U.S.

For every U.S. suicide death, there are 8 to 26 attempts.

There are an estimated 1.4 million attempts per year in the U.S.

Suicide deaths consistently outnumber homicide deaths by 3 to 2.

There are more suicides globally than deaths from war and violence combined.

Approximately twice as many Americans die by suicides than from HIV/AIDS.

Compared to the rest of the world, the United States has a moderately high suicide rate. However, Eastern European countries have the highest rates of suicide.

More than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have depression or another diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder.

In a national poll, 78 percent of Americans think that many suicides are preventable with appropriate research, interventions and services.

Nationally, 20-50 percent of people who kill themselves had previously attempted suicide.

National Suicide Hotline: 800-784-2433 or 800-273-8255.

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